

Tom Stallard
Chairman, Valley Vision Board of Directors
Summary for Little Hoover Commission Hearing
November 20, 2003

In response to your request for a brief summary of my planned remarks, I respectfully submit the following:

As former Yolo County Supervisor and now the incoming Chairman of Valley Vision Board of Directors, I believe that there must be a fundamental change in the nature of the way we communicate with one another in order to achieve balanced budgets and major structural reform.

Politics have failed to promote the public good in California. Political behavior has produced an ever-widening gulf between the primary political parties with the result that those elected to represent the people are often at considerable variance with the mainstream. The recent recall election must be seen as a reaction to this situation.

A conferencing model used by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments which I chaired in 1999 has proven effective to give instant feedback to participants. One thousand attendees at a conference on transportation, air quality and land use were given the opportunity to hear a series of experts give their views on these critical subject areas. After each presentation, a series of questions were presented on large screens in the room. Each person, utilizing a wireless device, could select from among four response choices to the question. Participants would have only 20 seconds to determine their answer. A computer would tally the responses and produce bar charts and/or pie charts within an additional 10 seconds giving everyone an immediate snapshot of opinion. This then became a database from which to propose solutions.

Similarly, an exercise of this sort could be structured to address budgetary issues. Each member of the Legislature could appoint five delegates, hopefully including themselves. The Governor could appoint 200 delegates and the other constitutional officers could appoint among them the remaining 200. This group of 1000 could hear presentations on choices and respond to questions utilizing the same technology. The product of the conference would be foundational for producing a budget. One feature of this approach is that it would preclude caucusing which seems to create gaps rather than bridge them.

Speaking of bridges, when a replacement bridge is built, the old one must remain in service until the new one is ready for use. This has to be our approach to major structural reform. We need to find new ways of interacting with one another. We also have to open up the process to be much more inclusive. Our Legislature has proven itself incapable of making these changes. They are too dependent on interests of one kind or another to be able

to take the necessary risks. The conferencing model already presented could be used to similar advantage in addressing other issues.

Finally, there are a lot of smart people in California whose voices are rarely heard in these discussions. We must overcome the "hunker down" mentality in Sacramento and become much more inclusive. The state/local government relationship is much in need of reshaping. In a time when corporate America is touting the virtues of "servant leadership", we need to change this fundamental relationship from one that is adversarial and hierarchical in nature to one that is a true partnership of equals with vehicles of communication designed to enhance the relationship.

I think substantial budget savings are possible if local governments throughout the state are invited to identify costs that could be reduced or eliminated. Examples of this are the state requirement to submit grant applications year after year for the same programs that are always funded anyway. Another would be eliminating separate auditing for multiple programs dealing with the same issue area such as pregnant teens. A third example would be eliminating the practice of developing new lengthy and detailed contracts year after year for continuing programs when a simple one page "contract extension" would suffice. As chairman of the Board of Supervisors in Yolo County, I would be required to sign eight original copies of lengthy contracts for services for the State Department of Health when often the amount of reimbursement was just a few thousand dollars. We also need to start using electronic technology to avoid warehousing so much paper.